

## Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' New Book and Walter J. Ong's Thought

**Thomas J. Farrell**

Professor Emeritus in Writing Studies

University of Minnesota Duluth

[tfarrell@d.umn.edu](mailto:tfarrell@d.umn.edu)

<http://www.d.umn.edu/~tfarrell>

In his recent op-ed column titled “Finding Peace Within the Holy Texts” in the *New York Times* (dated November 17, 2015), the conservative columnist David Brooks (born in 1961 in Toronto), who is Jewish, devoted his column recently to reviewing Rabbi Jonathan Sacks’ new book *Not in God’s Name: Confronting Religious Violence* (2015).

Unfortunately, the recent terrorist attacks in Paris and Mali make Sacks’ deeply informed discussion of religious violence timely.

Fortunately, Brooks accurately paraphrases certain points from Sacks’ book.

Unfortunately, Brooks makes Sacks sound like he is advancing a conventionally conservative argument that Brooks himself or some other American conservatives today might advance. Because progressives and liberals tend not to like conventionally conservative arguments, I want to suggest that progressives and liberals may want to take a look at Sacks’ deeply informed, enormously thought-provoking, but not entirely convincing new book.

Toward the end of his new book, Sacks says, “Wars are won by weapons, but it takes ideas to win a peace” (pages 17 and 264). Sacks says, “This book is about one such idea: an alternative to the sibling rivalry that has been a source of fratricide and religious violence throughout history” (page 264).

As Sacks notes, wars between Catholics and Protestants raged in Europe for a century, leading to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 (pages 17 and 224). Sacks summarizes Stephen Toulmin’s explanation of how the peace eventually emerged in Europe:

“Stephen Toulmin offered the best explanation of what motivated those who sought a new way: ‘Failing any effective political way of getting the sectarians to stop killing each other, was there no other possible way ahead? Might not philosophers discover, for instance, a new and more rational basis for establishing a framework of concepts and beliefs capable of achieving the agreed certainty that the sceptics had said was impossible?’” (quoted on page 244 from Toulmin’s book *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* [1992, page 55]).

Toulmin here offers us a benign and positive way to see the Enlightenment, both the European Enlightenment and the American Enlightenment. Instead of using biblical texts or religious doctrines, the new approach invoked reason. As a result, the Age of Reason emerged historically as secular in spirit. (I will discuss the Enlightenment further momentarily.)

As a result of this modern secular bent, many religionists tended to take exception to the secular spirit. As Sacks notes, today radical jihadists and suicide bombers inspired by their understanding of Islam take exception, on the one hand, to the secular spirit in Muslim nations that have secular governments and, on the other hand, to the generalized secular spirit of the West. So we can say that radical jihadists and suicide bombers are doubly anti-secular – they are against secularism.

Of course Pope Francis inveighs against secularism. But he doesn't go around blowing up people.

Of course Paris was the home of the European Enlightenment and the Declaration of the Rights of Man, which is why radical jihadists and suicide bombers attacked Paris.

Because our Declaration of Independence was formulated and promulgated in Philadelphia, Philadelphia could be seen as the home of the American Enlightenment. However, from the standpoint of radical jihadists and suicide bombers, Washington, D.C., might be a more suitable symbolic target.

Sacks himself tells us exactly how he sees his philosophical task of confronting religious violence, which he claims that “moral philosophy has failed adequately to confront. Since Plato, thinkers have explored many factor that make us moral: knowledge, habit, virtue, empathy, sympathy, rationality, intuition. Yet we saw how all these things failed in Germany in the 1930s, and not only among the masses but even among some of the greatest minds of the day” (page 179).

Now, Sacks, who was born in 1948 and raised and lives in the United Kingdom, holds a Ph.D. in philosophy from Oxford University. He has more than 20 books to his credit. Basically, his new book is a philosophical treatise in moral philosophy. In his new book he sets out to contribute to the still emerging new thought that might help secure the peace against our contemporary religious violence.

I have no idea if Sacks knows Brooks or other American conservatives. However, at the present time, Sacks holds appointments at New York University and Yeshiva University in the United States and also at King's College, London.

In any event, Sacks is familiar with the mature work of the American Jesuit cultural historian and theorist Walter J. Ong (1912-2003), as he explicitly acknowledges in an endnote (page 282) and otherwise shows in the text of his book (see, for example, pages 16, 17, 161, and 210).

In endnote 1 for chapter 9 (page 282), Sacks says “On the impact of literacy on consciousness, see Walter J. Ong’s masterly and suggestive works, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1967; and *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, London, Routledge, 1991.” (But Ong’s *Orality and Literacy* was originally published in London by Methuen in 1982.)

First, I want to discuss Ong’s massively researched book *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (Harvard University Press, 1958).

What emerges in Ong’s study as the Art of Reason is the kind of philosophical argument that we encountered above in Toulmin’s account of the emergence of the Age of Reason – and the Enlightenment (see Sacks, page 244; also see page 28, 78-79, and 190).

But what does Ong mean by the presumably earlier Art of Discourse? Sacks captures the earlier spirit of the Art of Discourse in philosophical argument in his instructive discussion of the medieval Islamic thinker Averroes (1126-1198):

“Averroes had argued that you should always, when presenting a philosophical argument, cite the views of your opponents. Failure to do is an implicit acknowledgment of the weakness of your own case” (page 234).

In his book *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (1958), Ong sees the Art of Discourse as basically dialogic in spirit and the Art of Reason as basically monologic in spirit (i.e., setting forth one’s own line of argument without explicit mention of and refutation of real or imagined adversarial positions).

However, in his book *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (Yale University Press, 1967), the expanded version of his 1964 Terry Lectures at Yale’s Divinity School, Ong discusses polemical structures (pages 195-222, 236-255, 262-286, 293, and 301). The Greek word “polemos” means war, struggle. The Art of Discourse is explicitly structured as polemic – a war of ideas, as it were. By contrast, the Art of Reason is structured in a far more irenic way.

In his book *Fighting for Life: Contest, Sexuality, and Consciousness* (Cornell University Press, 1981), the published version of Ong’s 1979 Messenger Lectures at Cornell University, Ong prefers to work with the term agonistic, instead of the terms polemic or ludic. The Greek word “agon” means contest, struggle.

Both the Art of Discourse and the Art of Reason are fundamentally agonistic in spirit.

In effect, the anthropologist Philip Carl Salzman’s book *Culture and Conflict in the Middle East* (2008) describes the kind of psychodynamic that Ong refers to as male agonistic behavior.

Sacks says that the name Jacob means struggle and that the new name Israel also means struggle, but in a different way (page 138). As Sacks explains it, this new and different way of struggling involves what C. G. Jung and his followers describe as establishing the ego-Self axis in the psyche – that is, the inner connection between ego-consciousness, on the one hand, and, on the other the archetypal Self in the human psyche. Even though Jung and his followers claim that the archetypal Self in the human psyche is universal, each human person who struggles with the ego-Self axis in his or her psyche emerges as a unique and distinct and separate person – not as an imitation of or a substitute for another person. As we will see momentarily, Ong liked to characterize his mature work as phenomenological and personalist in cast.

Sacks' philosophical argument in his new book involves citing the views of his opponents. By contrast, Ong in most of his publications is decidedly irenic in his approach.

Even though the monologic and irenic spirit that emerged in Ramist philosophical arguments came to characterize philosophical arguments in the Age of Reason, the earlier Art of Discourse did not entirely disappear, as Thomas O. Sloane shows in his book *On the Contrary: The Protocol of Traditional Rhetoric* (1997).

Now, Ong liked to characterize his mature work as phenomenological and personalist in cast. For years, Ong taught an honors course at Saint Louis University on Existentialist Literature.

Because theistic existentialists believed in a personal God, Ong preferred to use the terms personalist and personalism instead of the far more commonly used terms existentialist and existentialism respectively, even though there were certain famous atheistic existentialists.

In my book *Walter Ong's Contributions to Cultural Studies: The Phenomenology of the Word and I-Thou Communication*, 2nd ed. (Hampton Press, 2015), I honor both the phenomenological and the personalist cast of Ong's thought.

For Ong, the American Jesuit biblical scholar John L. McKenzie's the book *The Two-Edged Sword: An Interpretation of the Old Testament* (Bruce Publishing, 1956) establishes that the existentialist and personalist orientation of the Hebrew Bible.

Among other things, McKenzie discusses oral tradition (pages 60-71).

As to the title of his book, McKenzie explains it by using the following passage from the New Testament letter to the Hebrews 4:12:

“The word of God is living and effective and sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates to the division of the soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerns the thought and intentions of the heart” (quoted on page ii).

But Sacks claims that the narratives in Genesis are “narratives that only reveal their full meaning to those who have undergone a long process of moral growth” (page 173).

Now, to spell out the obvious, Sacks believes in a personal God. In addition, he discusses the Hebrew Bible, especially the stories in Genesis extensively in his new book. Indeed, he claims that Genesis is a “philosophical treatise constructed in the narrative mode. It represents truth-as-story rather than truth-as-system, and it does so for a profoundly philosophical reason: it is about *meanings*, and meanings cannot be conveyed except through narrative – by a plot that unfolds through time, allowing us to enter the several perspectives of its dramatis personae and sense the multiple interpretations (narrative and counter-narrative) to which stories give rise. Unlike philosophical systems, which we either understand or don’t, biblical narrative functions at many different levels of comprehension. Out understand of it deepens as we grow” (page 171; his emphasis).

To spell out the obvious, Sacks does NOT claim that Genesis, or any other part of the Hebrew Bible, is a philosophical treatise in the ancient Greek philosophical tradition of thought.

Granted, we do NOT usually think of philosophical treatises as constructed in the narrative mode.

Nevertheless, the narrative mode abounds in Plato’s writings. In the book *The Myths of Plato* (Macmillan, 1905), John Alexander Stewart has compiled all of the narratives from Plato’s dialogues in Greek and translated them on parallel pages into English.

So if the narrative mode was perfectly acceptable for Plato to use to construct his philosophical dialogues, then the narrative mode surely must be acceptable for the anonymous human authors of Genesis, and other parts of the Hebrew Bible, to use to construct their philosophical arguments.

But Sacks works with the opposition of the biblical thought-world to the mythological thought-world (pages 88, 116, 117, and 141) that parallels and is consistent with the opposition that Mircea Eliade works with in his book *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, translated by Willard R. Trask (1954; orig. French ed., 1949), a work that Ong frequently refers to.

Also see Eric Voegelin’s book *Israel and Revelation* (1956), which Sacks quotes (page 230).

As Sacks notes, the Hebrew Bible argues that time is more than a cycle of eternal recurrences (page 157). As he points out, historical time “makes its first appearance in the Hebrew Bible, and constitutes one of the most original contributions to human thought” (page 140). Sacks says, “Biblical consciousness is *chronological*” (page 171; his emphasis).

For a perceptive account of the difference between the mythological thought-world and the ancient Greek philosophical thought-world, see Eric A. Havelock's book *Preface to Plato* (1963), a work that Ong never tired of referring to.

Despite Sacks' strong argument that the Hebrew Bible does NOT represent the mythological thought-world of ancient Greek mythology found in the Homeric epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and in ancient Greek tragedies, he unequivocally characterizes certain biblical narratives as expressing the mythological thought-world found in ancient Greek sources. But then he belabors the brilliant distinction between what he refers to as the narrative (the mythological thrust) and the counter-narrative in Genesis (pages 121, 123, 124, 125, and 172). In Genesis, at least at time, the counter-narrative undercuts the narrative, most notably in the extended story about Jacob.

But Sacks does NOT claim to detect a mythological thrust in the story about Abraham – who is considered by all three monotheistic traditions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – to be the exemplar of their religious faith. In plain English, Sacks does NOT see Abraham as representing a mythological hero. As Sacks points out, Abraham “sought to be true to his faith and a blessing to others regardless of their faith” (page 4). But Sacks sees young Jacob as representing the spirit of the mythological hero.

However, Sacks himself says that Jacob's wrestling match at night with the angel of God “was Jacob's battle with existential truth. Who was he? The man who longed to be Esau? Or the man called to a different destiny, the road less travelled” (page 138).

Presumably each and every one of us must wrestle with such existential questions.

Sacks says, “Peace comes when we see our reflection in the face of God and let go of the desire to be someone else” – as young Jacob had desired to be Esau (page 139).

In the expression that Sacks uses often, Jacob had undergone a role reversal (pages 141, 144-160, 179, 183, 184, 187, and 188).

What Sacks refers to as the psychodynamic involved in inner role reversal is the psychodynamic that the French existentialist philosopher Louis Lavelle (1883-1951) describes in his book *Evil and Suffering*, translated by Bernard Murchland (Macmillan, 1963; orig. French ed., 1940).

Lavelle sets up the contrast between the evil person and the honest person: “Suffering [including of course abandonment feelings from early childhood wounding] becomes one with the act that regenerates me; it is efficacious suffering that the evil [person] does not know and which the honest [person] nourishes rather than excuses” (page 88).

“I recognize myself in [the person] who committed the fault [from which I am suffering], but I suffer only because I refuse to remain that person [who committed the fault from which I am suffering]” (page 88).

In effect, the honest person says, “my present will . . . does not wish to identify itself with what the fault has made of me” (page 88).

Perhaps the hardest part of what Lavelle says is the part about identifying through my free choice with the person(s) involved with the fault committed against me has made of me what I am today – a wounded person. The fault committed against me has wounded me. As a result of being wounded, I have suffered a certain loss of vitality. Despite the loss of vitality that I have suffered, and may still be suffering further from in my ongoing life, Lavelle says that I can overcome my wound by identifying with the person who committed the fault against me that resulted in the wound.

In the case of Jacob, the fault committed against him was apparently committed by Esau. So what Sacks refers to as inner role reversal requires Jacob to identify with Esau. As a result of this inner psychodynamic, Jacob discovers who he is. No doubt this kind of inner role reversal is easier said than done.

Sacks’ wonderful comments about memory (pages 184, 187, 188, and 244) resemble Lavelle’s wonderful comments about memory in the first chapter of his last book, translated as *The Meaning of Holiness* by Dorothea O’Sullivan (Pantheon Books, 1954; orig. French ed. 1951; also translated into Spanish, German, and Italian). This book is one of three of Lavelle’s books that Ong included on the reading list for his honors course on Existentialist Literature at Saint Louis University, mentioned above. (The other two were works in French that had not been translated into English.)

In addition, I would recommend that Sacks read Lavelle’s earlier book *The Dilemma of Narcissus*, translated by William Gairdner (London: George Allen & Unwin; and New York: Humanities Press, 1973; orig. French ed., 1939).

Ong lists Lavelle’s book *The Dilemma of Narcissus* in the bibliography of his own book *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (University of Toronto Press, 1986, page 166), the published version of Ong’s 1981 Alexander Lectures at the University of Toronto.

As Ong explicitly acknowledges (page 338, note 54), he borrowed the aural-visual opposition in cognitive processing that he works with in his book *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (1958), mentioned above, from Lavelle’s book *La Parole et L’écriture* (1942), which has never been translated into English. (Ong also lists this book by Lavelle on the reading list for his course on Existentialist Literature, mentioned above.)

But Andrea Wilson Nightingale's book *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy: Theoria in Its Cultural Context* (2004) supports and strengthens Ong's and Lavelle's claim that Greek and all Western philosophic thought involves accentuating visual cognitive processing.

At a later time, Ong further articulated his account of sensory cognitive processing in "'I See What You Say': Sense Analogue for Intellect" in the journal *Human Inquiries: Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry*, volume 10, numbers 1-3 (1970): pages 22-42.

Subsequently, Ong reprinted that essay, revised, in his book *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (Cornell University Press, 1977, pages 122-144).

For a sharply focused discussion of Ong's phenomenological philosophical thought, see my essay "[Understanding Ong's Philosophical Thought](#)" at the UMD d-Commons.

Incidentally, in Sacks' brilliant discussion of how young Jacob was able to trick his old and blind father into giving him the blessing that Isaac had planned to give his first-born son Esau, Sacks describes the narrative in Genesis as "almost an essay on the senses":

"[W]hen Jacob had earlier taken Esau's blessing, Isaac was blind. The deception was possible only because Isaac could not see. The text at that point is almost an essay on the senses. Deprived of one (sight), Isaac uses the other four. He *tastes* the food, *touches* Jacob's hands (which Rebekah has covered with goatskins) and *smells* his clothes ('Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field the Lord has blessed'). He *hears* his voice ('The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau'). Eventually Isaac trusts the evidence of touch, taste and smell over sound, and gives Jacob the blessing. He does so only because *he cannot see Jacob's face*" (page 134; Sacks' emphasis).

Thus young Jacob is a trickster figure – just as Odysseus is in the ODYSSEY. Of course Jacob's uncle Laban is also a trickster – he tricks young Jacob into marrying his eldest daughter Leah. Trickster stories abound in folklore because their tricks are so engaging to follow.

As Sacks brilliantly shows, the mature Jacob, twenty-two years later, returns home and effectively returns Esau's blessing to him. As Sacks notes, Jacob, before he had left home out of fear that Esau would kill him, had received a second blessing from then-disillusioned Isaac (Genesis 28:3-4). For the mature Jacob, it is the second blessing that counts the most for him.

Sacks says, "Jacob's [second] blessing had had nothing to do with wealth or power [as his first blessing did]. . . . To receive that [second] blessing Jacob did not have to dress in Esau's clothes. Instead *he had to be himself*, not a man of nature [like Esau] but one whose ears were attuned to a voice beyond nature, the call of God to live for something other than wealth or power, namely, for the human spirit as the breath of God and human dignity as the image of God" (page 137; Sacks' emphasis).



But the full import of the second blessing for the mature Jacob emerges only in the return episode of Jacob's wrestling at night with the angel of God. His wrestling at night is symbolic of the inner wrestling involved in discernment of spirits in weighing and evaluating possible free choices in our existential decision making.

Now, even though I find much in Sacks' new book to value, I do not find everything he says about so-called mimetic desire entirely convincing. Therefore I want to use something else that Lavelle says to construct my own alternative explanation of radical jihadists and suicide bombers.

As a point of departure, though, I will take something that Sacks says: "[T]he world is changing faster than at any time in history, and since change disorients, it leads to a sense of loss and fear that can turn into hate" (page 21).

But a sense of loss should trigger a mourning process. However, certain people are incapable of mourning in a healthy way. For example, in the book *Bush on the Couch: Inside the Mind of the President*, 2nd ed. (2007), Justin A. Frank, M.D., claims that George W. Bush was incapable of mourning in a healthy way (pages xvi, 15, and 16), which means that he still carries unresolved mourning in his psyche as the result of his sister's death when both he and she was young children. Blessed are those people who can mourn in a healthy way.

In the self-help book *The Journey from Abandonment to Healing* (2000), Susan Anderson focuses on mourning non-death loss. She repeatedly advises us that loss due to the death of a significant person in our life involves a mourning process that is different in certain ways from the mourning process involved in mourning non-death loss. Nevertheless, both of these mourning processes involve experiencing rage, because both awaken and tap into unresolved mourning of earlier losses and their accompanying abandonment feelings. In addition, both healthy mourning and unhealthy mourning evoke feelings of powerlessness, because the imperative of mourning is overpowering and irresistible.

Now, in the *Iliad*, the invocation of the Muse at the very beginning announces that this is the song about the rage of King Achilles. He is portrayed as experiencing both kinds of mourning processes that Anderson discusses: (1) King Achilles understandably mourns the non-death loss he suffered when King Agamemnon publicly dishonored him, and (2) King Achilles later mourns the death of his comrade-in-arms Patroclus.

When King Achilles freely chooses to return to the war and fight again, he knows from his mother Thetis' revelation of two possible fates that await him that he will not return from the war alive – he will die. Under the influence of his powerful mourning, he chooses to return to the war and die.

But it appears that radical jihadists and suicide bombers today are incapable of experiencing mourning in a healthy way. Under the influence of their powerful mourning, suicide bombers freely choose to blow themselves and others up.

In effect, Lavelle sees feelings of powerlessness as evoking the infant's abandonment feelings. In the essay "Those Who Are Separated and United" in the book *Evil and Suffering* (pages 91-152), mentioned above, Lavelle makes the following statement:

"We may well think that this [metaphysical, or existential] anxiety is very primitive [i.e., from our early childhood]. If it is true that the infant's most despairing cry is not the one he utters when he feels physical pain but rather when he feels himself abandoned, when he no longer sees familiar faces around him and when all his contacts with the universe seem to him suddenly broken off. Let us not diminish the value of the distress by saying that it is purely organic; it is the very birth of self-consciousness. In the deepest moments of life it reappears. And no philosophy can attain to the heart of being without taking it as a point of departure" (page 100).

Thus Lavelle sees metaphysical anxiety, which can also be referred to as existential anxiety, as connected with the young child's wounding experience of abandonment feelings.

If and when we are able to resolve the wounding experience(s) involved in early childhood abandonment feelings, then we will emerge prepared to live our lives with optimal vitality – despite the seemingly existential threats posed by change.

Next, I want to discuss an odd oversight in Sacks' book. For understandable reasons, twice (pages 90 and 261), Sacks refers to the Second Vatican Council's landmark decree *Nostra Aetate* (Latin for "In Our Time"), which Pope Paul VI officially promulgated on October 28, 1965, as the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions.

However, even though Sacks discusses the separation of church and state (pages 12 and 226), he does not mention Vatican II's landmark decree *Dignitatis Humanae* (Latin for "Of the Dignity of the Human Person"), which Pope Paul VI officially promulgated on December 7, 1965, as the Declaration on Religious Freedom.

For a detailed account of the intellectual struggle involved in Vatican II's adopting that landmark decree, see Barry Hudock's article "The Fight for Religious Freedom" in the Jesuit-sponsored magazine *AMERICA* dated November 30, 2015, which is also available at the magazine's website. John Courtney Murray, S.J., was an American Jesuit theologian who also happened to serve as the editor of *AMERICA*.

Also see Hudock's new book *Struggle, Condemnation, Vindication: John Courtney Murray's Journey Toward Vatican II* (2015).

The complete texts of both *Nostra Aetate* and *Dignitatis Humanae* are included in the book *Vatican II: The Essential Texts*, edited by Norman P. Tanner, S.J. (2012, pages 319-328 and 299-318 respectively, including prefatory material for each by Edward P. Hahnenberg).

Finally, I want to mention the most under-explained prediction that Sacks makes in his new book. He says, “To put it simply: *The seventeenth century was the dawn of an age of secularization. The twenty-first century will be the start of an age of desecularization*” (page 18).

But does desecularization mean the end of the separation of church and state? Sacks really does not explain exactly what his prediction means.

Of course radical jihadists and suicide bombers are for desecularization, because they are seriously opposed to secularization. Perhaps Sacks’ prediction simply means that we have entered an age of radical jihadists and suicide bombers that could extend through the entire twenty-first century.

But police and military efforts to combat radical jihadists and suicide bombers will undoubtedly continue.

In addition, Muslim preachers in various countries will undoubtedly continue to wage the war of words and ideas against the radical jihadists and suicide bombers. No doubt Muslim preachers know how to set forth their philosophic arguments in the spirit of the Art of Discourse that Sacks describes Averroes as advocating and practicing (page 234).

Centuries after the separation of church and state was established in the American Enlightenment, Vatican II decisively changed Catholicism with it approved the decree *Dignitatis Humana* (Latin for “Of the Dignity of the Human Person”), which Pope Paul VI officially promulgated on December 7, 1965, as the Declaration of Religious Freedom.

If medieval Catholicism can change decisively, perhaps medieval Islam can change decisively, despite the opposition to change mounted by radical jihadists and suicide bombers.

But will such decisive change in Islam take an entire century to emerge?

Rob Kall, the founder and publisher of the online OpEdNews (where I have published numerous op-ed pieces), likes the idea of bottom-up change. To spell out the obvious, there is no top-down governance structure in Islam, as there is in Roman Catholic Church.

The future of Islam is a stake. They say that necessity is the mother of invention.

If an alternative to radical jihadists and suicide bombers is to emerge effectively in Islam, it will have to emerge as the result of bottom-up change spearheaded by Muslim preachers in various countries. Only people as thoroughly versed in Islamic thought as Sacks is versed in biblical

thought can engage in the war of words and ideas to effectively combat the radical jihadists and suicide bombers.

Perhaps Muslim preachers and other Muslims will find Sacks' discussion of biblical thought perceptive and instructive, as I myself do. However, in the language of American football, they will have to take the ball and run with it on their own in their own cultures.

In conclusion, Sacks confronts religious violence, as his subtitle promises that he would. His argument about the pervasiveness of so-called mimetic desire is well constructed, but I do not find it cogent or convincing. As a result, I happen to prefer the psychological argument that I have constructed as an alternative explanation to his explanation involving mimetic desire – of what animates and motivates radical jihadists and suicide bombers. Of course my alternative explanation might not be right. In any event, I don't think his explanation involving mimetic desire is right.

Unfortunately, Sacks' new book does not come equipped with an index. It should have an index – or perhaps more than one (e.g., a separate index of biblical names).